"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

No. 205 1956

ENDURING VALUES IN RURAL LIFE

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HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

OUR CONCERN FOR ENDURING VALUES

Most of us have a pretty general idea of what constitutes enduring values. They are "the tree which bringeth forth good fruit" - they result in what the Apostle Paul called "the fruits of the spirit" or love, joy, peace. They are the basis of reverence and the favorable soil for praise and devotion. They constitute neighborliness and brotherhood and are the ground from which springs more of their own kind.

So we say that whatever fosters enduring values is sacred - what defeats them is sinful. Thus our desire is not merely to perpetuate an institution or to glorify a particular quality of life, it is rather to discern and foster whatever makes for a fullness of life. And because a large portion of the people of our nation live in communities designated as town or country we are desirous that they and their particular habitat be able to achieve this fullness and, if possible, share widely any special advantages which such a place of living provides.

RURAL INFLUENCE IN AMERICAN LIFE

The statistics describing the shift of the United States from an agricultural to an industrial or urban nation are well known to

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most of us. We know, for instance, that in 1820 it required one rural person to supply the needs of four urban persons. In 1955 one rural person supplies the needs of approximately nineteen persons. What no one will ever be able to describe accurately, however, is the extent to which American life and culture is conditioned by the rural background by that small and ever declining percentage of people who make up the rural farm population. Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis that it was the frontier which shaped much of American life has received widespread acceptance. There are those who have challenged the Turner thesis insisting that it was really land value increment rather than the clearing of land and pushing forward the frontier which made American patterns what they are. It is not our purpose to contend with these theses but rather to accept the fact that it was the application of labor to the land which determined many of American cultural patterns. The very fact that land was available and could be had for a willingness to clear it and till it gave a sense of individual competence, self-reliance and dignity to manual labor.

The fact, too, that the Bible is so largely a rural book served to re-enforce the laborers on the land giving them a sense of kinship with their spiritual forebears who came into the land of Canaan. Individual righteousness and group discipline were consonant with the experiences and purposes of Old Testament pioneers. Many of us are ourselves the products of this sense of close kinship between American rural life and Biblical ethics.

CHANGES IN EMPHASIS

There is no thoughtful person but would acknowledge that severe losses have taken place in the shifts which have marked our change from a rural to an urban people. As Carl Taylor[1] suggests, there is no use crying about these losses. There is, presumably, cause for regret at the depletion of folk culture, the complete commercializing of agriculture, the decadence of rural neighborhood life and the passing of self-sufficient farming. But on the other hand there have been significant gains. Who would want to have rural women return to the backbreaking home life - heavy lifting and long hours of arduous labor? Nor is there anything particularly dignifying about grain scooping or loading manure by hand. Neither is there any particular virtue in spending long hours going to town for machinery parts. The list of gains is almost endless. Taylor adds, "what we need is not so much the restoration of either the practices or the ideologies of yesterday's rural life but a recognition of the value of those things, the absence of which is tending to make rural life take on materialistic, mercenary crassness of blasé modern urban life."

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THE NEW FRONTIER

We now are confronted with alternatives and can choose the kind of values we most want to see perpetuated. Many of the superior values of another epoch have survived very well, but on the other hand there are evidences of disappearance as well. The enduring values were transmitted to us in the culture. Of course there has always been the choice whether men would accept them or not. Today the opportunity for their rejection is more available, in part because the alternatives now seem to be more numerous. Whereas the role of the church in the period past has been to acquaint men with the enduring values its function now is to evaluate those values against which others are serious competitors.

Thus a new type of frontier in our generation replaces the one portrayed by Frederick Jackson Turner. It is a philosophical, a theological, a spiritual frontier, the application to which will be just as definitive and as consequential for our culture as was the geographic frontier of the American continent. This new frontier lies in our understanding and appropriation of the enduring values. True, they are not confined to rural life. They are not solely rural values. We are concerned with them, however, because of the fortuitous circumstances prevailing in rural life which may enhance their expression. I am firmly convinced that the future leadership in religious life in this country will go to those churches which understand and can make clear the primacy of those values.

ENDURING VALUES

No religion has survived or possessed vitality and validity apart from its close interrelation with the type of life in which it is experienced. We want that people's lives shall be fulfilled as God intended them to be. What, then, are the most fortuitous circumstances within which this fulfillment takes place?

Thomas Jesse Jones[1] has suggested that there are four areas in which primitive people find their fulfillment. These same four areas are as applicable to civilized or perhaps industrialized urbanized folk - the areas are: health, work, family

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[1]Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin #78 - January 1943

my intention to have presented here the setting within which and out of which these values find expression. Fundamentally they have, it seems to me, the spiritual roots delineated so briefly in the four sections above.

I would like to add one more word of footnote concerning the means of fostering and furthering these values. Symbols come to carry both the fuller meaning of the deepest experiences and also in them may be discovered what increases our understanding of ultimate truth. For Christians the Lord's Supper, or the act of Holy Communion, or the Euchrist, or by whatever term this sacrament may be known to us, gathers up and conveys to us the supreme truth within which are all the enduring values. It is significant that our Lord who knew lilies and sheep, fishermen and farmers, chose the fruit of the vine and the product of the grain field to serve as reminders of God's greatest act toward men. It is possible that rural people may have some advantages in comprehending the fullness of this truth and the full meaning may grow upon them through this symbol and sacrament.

and re-creation. By recreation is meant something more than what the modern use of the word connotes - it is literally the re-creation which includes religion.

You will notice how closely the categories Jones uses parallel those of Richard Cabot in his well known volume What Men Live By. Cabot's categories were: - work, play, love and worship.

If these are the four major areas within which life may achieve fulfillment and without any one of which fulfillment is impossible, we ask ourselves to what extent rural life is most conducive to the full, rounded experience out of which wholeness and genuine fulfillment may come.

I would like to suggest four (4) areas within which the enduring values are to be found and fostered.

1. Foremost in the hierarchy of soils conducive to the fostering of enduring values is family cohesiveness. We have not yet known in America the meaning of life without the family as the basic and organizing center. It is the family which gives demonstration of what the good society is. It is the family in which there is transmitted the ideals, the ethics, the aspirations which give meaning to the larger whole of society. I doubt if there is a single reputable social scientist but who insists that the family is the keystone. Rural living has made possible family cohesiveness to a greater degree than in other segments of our national life. True, not all the distinctive family life is in rural areas it may be possible that where determination to preserve the life of the family in an urban setting has been present the very quality of that family life has surpassed much that prevails in rural life. On the whole, however, family life has seemed to have its fullest opportunity for expression in rural circumstances.

2. Religion and work cannot be divorced. Enduring values, independent of one's form of self expression and of making a living, are unknown. "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" we know is not a curse. It expresses the correlation between effort and existence but if work is meaningless and without satisfaction the greatest portion of our waking hours are a denial of life's meaningfulness. Traditionally it has been in rural life that men have discerned the close relationship between their work and the needs of the self. Honest toil for the purpose of satisfying life's requirements or nourishment, of providing for the future, of sustaining the young, has assumed a rightful dignity and kept men wholesome and balanced. We are witnessing a tide of new interest in the Christian doctrine of vocation. The Laymens Institutes in Europe and the denominational and interdenominational conferences in America on this theme point to a re-awakening to one of the cardinal tenets of the Protestant Reformation. The

distance between the work some people have to do and the values of the product they produce has been a disillusioning experience in industrial society. One of the heartening notes in our time is the way in which industries are seeking to reduce this gap in order that workers may understand the significance of their contribution. This still leaves, for many, the question of the importance of what they are producing. For the agricultural producer this is less of a problem.

3. What Cabot called "play" and Jones termed "recreation" is more than either of those ideas mean to the ordinary hearer of them. Art, music, and drama, are not something apart from the full life. They are indispensable to it.

At this point there cannot be but disappointment over the departure from rural life of a capacity for artistic expression. We would be poorer indeed without the beauty and craftsmanship coming from the Southern highlands and many other portions of rural America. The status of artistic creations in County Fairs is probably symptomatic. We are proud of our skills in the raising of quality cattle, better lines of swine, sheep and livestock generally. The purpose here, presumably, is largely commercial. In other forms of creative expression - drama, on the stage and screen, or the work of great choruses, are inadequate substitutes for the enrichment growing out of individual participation. Enduring rural values are closely related to the achievement of gains in the creative arts.

4. From Matthew Arnold, I believe, comes the definition - religion is seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. Fragmentation is a characteristic of the times, life is so vast, experience so complex. We find it more satisfactory to focus on the partial and the separated unit. But society is not fractured. One part of the body cannot say of another "I have no need of thee." Religious insight concerning the cohesiveness and unity of all life is immeasurably profound. It is here that the church and the school may perform an indispensable function. There is nothing compulsory in rural life which makes it more conducive to the grasping of a sense of wholeness or the evolving of a philosophy more inclusive than that achievable by urban people. Nevertheless it does seem more possible in rural life to understand the inseparable relationship between all parts of nature, the interrelatedness of all living things of man and land and water. The rural person should be able to appreciate more readily that which is created and hence the Creator.

In the above mentioned values or conditions which foster enduring values nothing has been said about mutual dependency or the roots of democratic life. To many this is a serious omission. It is